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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000932

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UNFICYP](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: ELDER STATESMAN TROUBLED BY ELECTORAL THEMES,
NEGOTIATIONS IMPASSE

REF: A. NICOSIA 896

[1](#)B. NICOSIA 898

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The possible re-election of incumbent Tassos Papadopoulos deeply concerns former President and DISY founder Glafcos Clerides. In a November 14 meeting with the Ambassador, the octogenarian Clerides noted that many Cypriots realized the dangers "five more years of Tassos" would bring -- without a change in government policy and leadership, he fretted, the prospect of permanent partition loomed large. Regrettably, Papadopoulos had succeeded in framing the campaign debate around past actions and not future plans, a negative development that hurt challengers' chances. Clerides voiced similar pessimism over the short-term prospects for inter-communal Cyprus Problem negotiations. END SUMMARY.

Reading the Election Tea Leaves

[1](#)2. (C) Former President Clerides initiated the November 14 tete-a-tete and appeared in reasonable health despite a recent bout of illness and the death of his wife earlier this year. He turned first to Cyprus's presidential campaign, which will culminate with elections in mid-February. Papadopoulos had succeeded in turning the race into a backwards-looking affair, Clerides lamented. Instead of focusing on issues and the future, the President talked only of the 2004 Annan Plan and his "saving of the nation" via the "No" vote he had espoused. And his challengers, AKEL Secretary General Dimitris Christofias and DISY-sponsored

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Ioannis Kasoulides, had fallen into Papadopoulos's trap.

[1](#)3. (C) Should Papadopoulos survive Round 1 -- a probable scenario, Clerides ventured -- his defeat would depend on historic enemies AKEL (Communist) and DISY (right-wing) cooperating to some degree. Numerous AKEL leaders shared his negative opinions of Papadopoulos and were dismayed that certain AKEL rank-and-file supported the incumbent's candidacy. But they had few ideas on how to stop his re-election, Clerides revealed.

[1](#)4. (C) Cyprus needed a "wider government" to accommodate both DISY and AKEL, he reasoned. Yet both parties were loathe to admit publicly the need that one throw its weight behind the other to defeat Papadopoulos. The ex-President expressed interest in facilitating formation of this grand coalition, and hinted that he was seeking to broker contacts

toward this end. While no official meetings had taken place, officials of both parties were mulling possible contacts. All involved feared losing ground to the other side, unfortunately.

Time Running Short to Reunify Island

15. (C) Regardless of who won the election, the Greek Cypriot leadership must push hard to re-start Cyprus Problem negotiations in early 2008, Clerides asserted. The July 8 Agreement and its envisioned technical committees/working groups provided one vehicle of getting the sides talking, but direct talks between community leaders also were essential, the former President believed. Committees had failed in the past because members hesitated to make concessions or take action for fear of looking weak to their superiors. Further, they tended to draw "redder lines" than the leaders engaged in direct talks. In response, the Ambassador, while agreeing the July 8 process had drawbacks, believed that Papadopoulos and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat needed to give the process a go, since they freely had signed the agreement sixteen months ago, making July 8 "the only game in town" for the UN and the parties.

16. (C) The United Nations must help to push the sides forward, Clerides and the Ambassador agreed. Yet there were hotter conflicts demanding UN attention, and neither man saw UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon devoting greater attention to Cyprus as long as the island's communities remained at loggerheads. Further, Ban likely would not want to get burned in the way that former SYG Kofi Annan had. The U.S. would also have a key role to play, Clerides maintained, even if behind-the-scenes. To illustrate, he remarked that Annan would never have invested such efforts (referring to the 2001-2004 period) in Cyprus without the assumed backing of

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the United States and Great Britain.

Impressions on Doings North of the Green Line

17. (C) Internationally, the Greek Cypriot side was foundering, Clerides insisted, and the Turkish Cypriot community on the rise diplomatically. Turkey's hand looked to be improving as well. As that country became more involved in Middle East peace talks, Clerides even envisioned Israel or the Palestinian Authority somehow upgrading relations with the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" out of gratitude to Ankara. Close relations between the Republic of Cyprus and Israel likely would preclude such a move anytime soon, the Ambassador countered.

18. (C) Clerides revealed that he maintains contact with Talat. The T/C leader had visited him during his last hospital stint, for example. From their discussions, the briefings of his advisors, and media reporting, it was clear to the former President that Talat was losing popularity amongst his constituents, and increasingly appeared to be under Turkey's thumb, with little real maneuvering room on the Cyprus Problem.

COMMENT

19. (C) COMMENT: While Clerides offered some insight into the upcoming elections, perhaps more telling was what he neglected to say. The founder of DISY failed to talk up or show support for his former FM and current DISY candidate, Kasoulides. By focusing on the need for a Papadopoulos defeat and not a Kasoulides win, Clerides seems to be validating conventional wisdom here that the DISY candidate

has little chance of advancing into the second round. Efforts would be better spent, reasoned Clerides, on creating a DISY-AKEL coalition to defeat the incumbent -- comments recently echoed by opposition newspaper Alithia, and fringe/pro-Annan Plan candidate Costas Themistocleous. Others take the position one step further by stating that the Cyprus problem will be solved only when DISY and AKEL cooperate, since such an arrangement would allow whomever held the presidency to act in a forward-leaning way without worrying about his electoral back. Unfortunately, the elder statesman and "seen it all" Clerides did not offer any ideas for how this cooperative arrangement might work. As it stands now, the two parties are still sniping at each other publicly, to Tassos Papadopoulos's advantage. END COMMENT. SCHLICHER